

Destiny 1191

Chapter 1191 Reforged [Yamato]

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Shin came back home completely beaten after coming from the academy. The physical training that Benedict had told him yesterday was a literal thing. He was physically beaten up by his senior during the entire training session.

What was worse about it was the fact that he could heal himself with the help of his fire innate attribute, which also had an innate healing property. Due to that, Benedict had a lot of fun beating during the training. He beat Shin to his heart's content while also testing a couple of his newly created skills.

Shin was not spared even though he was recovering during the resting period. With that small timeframe, he had to continue reading the books that Professor Henry had left him while eating. And while he was doing that, he also had to answer a series of questions that Benedict was throwing him from time to time.

All the questions were from the previous topics that Shin had already read. And if he missed a single question and got it wrong, then he owed Benedict a punch in the face.

Fortunately, Shin was quite good at his studies. Aside from cooking and making his own music, studying was one of his hobbies before he played the game due to Arthur's insistence. Thanks to this, he did not have a hard time answering those ambush questions unless Benedict cheated and asked some questions about the topics that he had yet to read.

But given his sharp senses and pretty good mind, he was able to see through the tricks of his senior before he even fell on it.

In the end, Benedict could only intensify the beating session-... or rather the physical training session. He increased the difficulty by a large margin, making Shin unable to keep up with him.

Given that Benedict was a Mentalist, who specialized in spatial manipulation and void techniques, it was practically impossible for Shin to beat him in his current state.

Regardless, he still learned quite a lot of things during the sparring, especially when it came to controlling the Space Element. He also picked up quite a few tricks and took note of the others as he planned to apply in the game when he got the chance.

At the end of the day, he was able to benefit a lot from this training session despite his body being beaten to such a degree.

There were no physical injuries due to the healing properties of his fire innate attribute, but he was mentally exhausted when he arrived in his room. He did not even have the time to check on Arthur and the rest of their group, much less join them in their meal.

However, he was sure that they might be in a similar state as him, especially Arthur and Leonard, who were from the Combat Department.

Arriving at his room, he took a quick bath to wash away the sweat on his body before immediately heading toward his Gaming Cabin.

He was quite excited to log back in the game and check on the stats of his new equipment. Even though he was sure that they would be amazing, he still wanted to see them with his eyes before testing them in battle.

He would familiarize himself with the new [Yamato] before he tried tackling his Tier 3 Class Promotion Quest.

He was different from the rest of the players since he had the Transcendent Race and Class, so he would not need a special token like the Proof of Qualification to take the quest.

All he needed to do was to head to the Church of the Sun and Moon before looking for Archbishop Ronald. Then the rest would naturally follow.

It had been a while since he visited the church and met the archbishop. He was sure that there were a lot of tasks that he needed to finish right now since he had not taken any questions from them for a very long time. He could already imagine the archbishop complaining about him later when they met.

Maybe he had to compensate for his 'little' negligence later when he was done with everything.

When he thought about that, he quickly threw those thoughts at the back of his head and forgot about them for the time being.

Right now, he had to focus on the current task at hand before worrying about the rest.

He adjusted his position within the gaming cabin before closing his eyes and logging back into the game.

"Initiate game login! «Destiny's Fate»!"

Swoosh!

...

When Shin regained his vision, he found himself inside the room that he rented before he logged out of the game. It was at the highest rank, so the buffs that he received were also the best.

He had a 20% attack damage bonus and a 30% bonus on both physical defense and magic resistance. He also had 100% bonus experience points when hunting monsters and an additional 50% drop increase. He might not need the bonus experience points since his level was currently capped, but the rest was still the best.

The item drop chance before was now changed to drop increase for chest opening since the monster no longer dropped any kind of equipment unless they were weapons from humanoid creatures. The materials that that could be harvested from their bodies needed to be gathered manually too, so the previous buff was somewhat useless right now.

However, it also somewhat affected the drop rate of special materials from the monsters such as the Beast and Elemental Cores that Shin had gathered previously.

This buff would last for a whole day (in-game time) before it expired. It could also be extended by using some special tools that could be brought from the high-class inns, but their price was very expensive.

Only tycoons would buy such an item or people from the large guilds and organizations within the game. Some of the Titled and High Rankers would also be willing to buy them. After all, this was to increase their efficiency when hunting some monsters and grinding for their levels. It was also to make up for the time that they had missed when they were offline.

No one wanted to be left far behind by the others.

As for the Godlike Players, particularly the ones in the leading position, they did not care much about these little buffs since they were confident in their strengths.

After making sure that everything was in the correct order, Shin finally took out the newly forged [Yamato] and admired it for another time before finally opening its information panel and excitedly reading its details.

Item Name: [Yamato] (Reforged)

Item Type: Weapon (One-handed Sword/Katana)

Item Rank: Peak Obsidian (Quasi Meteor)

Growth Type: Current Level - 150

Durability: Indestructible

Physical Attack: 5500 to 6000

Magical Attack: 4500 to 5000

Stats:

+1000 STR and AGI

+500 INT

Details: An inherited Katana that is being passed down from generation to generation. It is the same Katana that has been used by the First Nephilim 'Zheptus'.

Requirements: Can only be wielded by an Envoy of The Church of The Sun and The Moon.

Additional Abilities:

1. Nephilim's Blade (Passive): Every time you hit your target with [Yamato], your attack speed increases by 10% and lasts for 5 seconds, stacking up to 5 times.

At Max stacks you will gain an additional 100% movement speed.

2. Nephilim's Ascent (Active): Enter a berserk state, increasing all your stats by 200% and movement speed by 1000%.

Duration: 30 mins.

Cooldown: 1 hour

3. Nephilim's Clarity (Active): When activated, regen your HP and MP by 5000 points per second and last for 180 seconds.

Cooldown: 1 Hour

4. Nephilim's Flame (Active): Enter a Transcendent State where each of your basic attacks will produce a crescent sword Qi that will fly for 15 meters in range and deal 300% Combined Damage (Physical + Magical) each strike.

Duration: 20 Seconds

Cooldown: 1 Hour

5. Nephilim's Wings (Passive/Active): Summon a pair of wings that will grant you the ability to fly.

Note 1: Upon summoning, the player will experience a huge burden on their mind until the wings are unsummoned. The longer the wings were summoned the stronger the mental burden the player will experience.

Note 2: Flying consumes mentality and mana. Increasing your flying speed will consume an additional amount of mana that will continuously rise depending on the maximum speed added.

Note 3: Every time the player deactivates their wings, you will have to wait for a whole hour before you can summon them again.

Remark: This sword had lost its peak form during the passage of time, but due to your efforts and after being reforged by the Saint Rank Blacksmith, Berlin, it regained its original form and even gained additional power.

Blessing 1: Blessed by the Brilliant Sun and the Abyssal Moon.

You gained control over a higher form Mana – You gained the Power of 'Primordial Eclipse'.

Blessing 2: Blessed by the Dusk and the Dawn.

-Upon activation, the [Yamato] will be split into two swords that carry the abilities of the Blades of the Dusk and Dawn.

-One sword controls the power of the Brilliant Sun while the other wields the power of the Abyssal Moon.

Note: During this form, the effects of the previous weapons – [Dusk Blade] and [Dawn Blade] – will take effect including their equipment set bonuses.

This item is bound to player 'Sickarius'.

Shin felt a little dizzy at the long string of information in front of his eyes. He was already expecting that the description of the weapon was like this, but it still hit a little differently when it was already in front of him.

The bonus stats greatly improved just like he had expected. However, he was not that much interested in it due to the current patch of the game.

The passive skill, Nephilim's Blade, had a minor increase, but it was practically non-existent given his current strength.

As for the active skills, most of them were somewhat the same as the previous ones that he used to have. But the overall effects were way better than before. Moreover, their cooldown time was also way shorter compared to what he remembered.

The Nephilim's Ascent, which was one of his berserk skills, had some minor improvements. The attack and movement speed bonuses were slightly better than before. The 200% increase in stats could already make Shin a literal raid boss, and more adding an additional 1000% movement speed bonus in the mix.

He was practically a nightmare at this point.

The Nephilim's Clarity surprised Shin a little since 5,000 health points per second for the entire 3 minutes was pretty huge. Even though it would be useless if he got one-shotted by his opponent or any boss-rank monsters, this healing effect would still have a huge impact during the battle as long as he survived.

But what really made Shin a little dizzy was the fifth skill that was just added after being promoted to obsidian rank.

Nephilim's Wings!

It was a skill that he was not expecting to get from a sword.

Moreover, it was practically a permanent pair of wings as long as he withstood the so-called burden that he would be suffering whenever he summoned them.

He was quite confident in this area since mental fortitude was one of his strong points. The problem was whether he could maintain the other states that were needed during the battle if he added them all together.

But aside from that, everything else had a positive outcome.

"Does this mean I will not need a flying mount as long as I can withstand the mental burden that comes in exchange?" he muttered before quickly remembering something.

He turned to his extra equipment set slot and looked at one of his signature cloaks, the [Dawn's Mantle].
"And this also means that I will no longer need this one too."

It was one of the items that became iconic for him. It was also the reason why the people were calling him the 'Angel of Death'.

But right now, it seemed like could now let of it.

"Should I give it to others?" he asked himself while considering it seriously.

But after thinking hard about it for quite some time, he shook his head as he still did know who he would give it to. He temporarily set it aside for now and continued looking at the [Yamato].

The more surprising part about what Berlin had done with this sword was the fact that he even added the special effects of the two previous sabers that Shin had.

Thinking about that, he activated the blessing skill, which made the single katana turn into two.

They had a similar design to the original form, but their color was somewhat different. One was a pitch-black katana while the other had a pure-white color.

Their appearance and color reminded Shin of his main weapons in the real world.

He played with the pair of swords a couple of times before returning them back to their original form and putting them back in the sheath.

Shin was really amazed at Berlin. He knew that the old dwarf was skilled, but this level was really beyond what the current players could achieve. From his perspective, only Black Hammer could barely achieve a similar feat with the current state of the game.

He then turned his attention to a certain line along the description of the sword. –

"Blessing 1: Blessed by the Brilliant Sun and the Abyssal Moon.

You gained control over a higher form Mana – You gained the Power of 'Primordial Eclipse'."

When he read about it, a sudden idea suddenly struck him. But he temporarily set it aside as he knew that it would require a long time of research for him to achieve what he wanted.

"One step at a time," he muttered before finally closing the information panel and getting ready to head out of the inn.

It was now time to try taking on his Tier 3 Class Promotion Quest.

Chapter 1192 New Quest (Part 1)

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Right after Shin left the inn, he quickly dropped by the branch of the Hand of Midas within the Holy City to resupply his potions and other necessities before heading straight to the Church of the Sun and Moon.

He had already seen the city earlier before he logged out yesterday, but he still could not believe how much it changed up until now.

Even the player-NPC population was very huge. He could see a lot of them walking down the streets, making it look like a very populated city in the real world. There was even some traffic on the road where a lot of carriages of different ranks were lining up.

As he walked, he constantly observed the players that he was passing by and used 'True Sight' to see through their levels. After a few minutes, he could not help but shake his head as he immediately realized the impact when a city was promoted to Capital Rank.

"Whistle~?. The average level of the players here is between 120-130. No wonder there are a smaller number of players visiting Calderock Town. The mainstream players are already catching up to us," he muttered as he looked around.

When he passed by the Adventurer Guild, he saw a huge crowd of players heading in and coming out of the building.

Naturally, along with the promotion of the Holy City, the rank of this branch of the Adventurer Guild would also rise a notch higher and their office building would also grow larger and higher. But despite how large the front and side doors that it had, it still looked quite small due to the flow of players visiting it.

Shin walked by a couple of well-known organizations while he was heading to the church and saw that almost every NPC organization grew accordingly. Even the churches of the other religions also grew larger and much fancier than what he could remember.

Maybe the only organization that did not follow this trend would be the Thieves Guild since such an organization needed to keep a low profile.

After a few minutes of walking, he finally arrived at his destination. And when he stood in front of the church, he could not help but be a little stunned at the sight that he was seeing.

The church was completely different from what it was inside his memory. The size of the church alone made him suspect that was the main castle of the royal family than a religious building. Even the bell towers looked fancier than before and their height could rival the tallest buildings within the city, if not higher. It looked like a watch tower rather than a bell tower.

When his gaze landed on the gates of the church, he could not help but swallow hard due to how large they were. He could also see the complex engravings that they had along with the huge emblem of the church at the center, which was very similar to the tattoo on his hand.

Then he saw the flow of players and NPCs coming in and out of the church. He was quite confused at first before quickly realized what was going on.

These players became believers of the church during the special event that Archbishop Ronald released. The church gave out a lot of quests related to monster settlements during that time and even some quests that concerned the Corrupted Cult.

Due to the rewards being so generous, a lot of players joined the church and became their believers. Even though most of them did not change their classes into Paladin or Priest of the church, quite a few still converted into one since the buffs and benefits that the church provided were quite worth it.

As for the NPC, Shin could already guess that it was because of the previous calamity that the Saint Heaven Kingdom had suffered due to the sudden invasion of the Corrupted Cult.

From what he could remember, the Church of the Sun and Moon was one of the leading organizations that helped the citizens along with the Church of Light. Because of this, a lot of NPCs became their devotees in the process.

The events made the influence of the church grow larger, resulting in what he was seeing right now. It would not be an overstatement if he said that the Church of the Sun and Moon was one of the most influential NPC organizations within the kingdom.

After reminiscing for a couple of moments, Shin shook his head and started walking toward the church, joining the crowd at entering without attracting any unwanted attention this time.

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No one dared to block Shin's path as he freely entered the restricted areas of the church. He had already removed his hood when he left the observant eyes of the other players, so the paladins guarding each area were able to see his mask.

None of the members of the church would be able to recognize this mask since it was the symbol of being an envoy of their organization. Such a position was very high within the church, making it impossible to provoke him within it.

Strange enough, Shin was able to walk through the corridors with great familiarity even though the church had changed so much after his last visit. Not only the outside had changed. The inside naturally also changed alongside it, making it hard to navigate his way within it.

But right after Shin stepped inside the church, a string of information quickly entered his mind, informing him about its interior. It seemed like a map was drawn and inserted within his head right after he entered.

He suspected that it was one of the features of the magic formations that he had seen engraved on the doorway of the church. They were not only scanning the players and NPCs passing through them but also identifying whoever entered the church.

The paladins and priests of the church were constantly pausing their steps and bowing to him whenever he came across them. It was not just a simple greeting but also a sign of respect. This made Shin a little uncomfortable which made him slightly nod his head to them as an acknowledgement before quickly walking away with hastened steps.

When he finally arrived in front of the door of Archbishop Ronald's room, he saw one of the high priests of the church waiting for him.

"The Archbishop is already waiting inside, Esteemed Envoy. You may enter anytime," said the high priest while giving a respectful bow.

Shin slightly nodded his head before strengthening his back to fix his posture. He tidied himself up a little in front of the door before lightly knocking on it. After that, he grabbed the knobbed and slowly opened the huge wooden door.

He carefully walked inside before closing the door behind him.

Click!

When the clinking sound of the knob sounded, he suddenly heard the familiar aged voice greeting him. "Don't you think that you are neglecting your duties a little too much recently?"

"I know that you are busy with this adventuring and such. You even solved one of the longest problems that the kingdom has. Yet you can't spare us a little time to drop by even for a moment to see how the church is doing?"

"Sigh, why are all the envoys of our church so free-spirited? Don't you all know that you have the responsibility to protect and serve the church?"

"Why do all of you leave all the work to us, the archbishops? We are not your handler. We also have our own duties to perform. Don't you think this is a little too much?"

The old archbishop continued to voice out his complaints, seemingly venting out all his piled-up frustrations.

Shin could only smile bitterly as he walked over before giving Archbishop Ronald a respectful bow. He waited patiently while keeping his silence.

"Sigh. I know that I am the one who invited you to the church. But that is because of the Mark of Eclipse on your hand. Do you know that I am now starting to regret that time now?"

"If only I could turn back time, then I may come up with a different decision," he said with a sigh as he ended his little 'sermon'.

He then finally turned around and looked at Shin, scrutinizing the young man with his observant eyes. After a few seconds, he finally smiled and repeatedly nodded his head, showing his satisfaction. "You have grown up well at the very least. You also have not disgraced the church with your recent achievements. I can at least your shortcomings slide because of this."

Shin heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that. He was ready to face some consequences due to his neglecting his duties within the church. He was even expecting to work himself hard to run some errands (a.k.a. Religious Quests) that the archbishop might give him.

But from the look of it, he seemed to have barely dodged the bullet.

Or was he?

"I know why you are here. You want to take the test for your next 'awakening', am I right?" said the archbishop, seemingly able to see through his thoughts.

*(NPCs term for Class Promotion Quest)

"Do me some favor first before I give you your quest," said Archbishop Ronald, shattering all of Shin's hope of getting away from this easily.

"So, there are really some errands before I can finally take on my class promotion," mumbled Shin to himself.

His voice was soft and quiet to the point that only he could hear. Unfortunately, the old archbishop was also an old monster within the Atlas World, so the latter's senses were pretty sharp.

"Yeah. You have to run some errands before you can undergo your next awakening," said the archbishop as he added. "Do you honestly believe that I will let you go just like that after not dropping by for a long time?"

"Usually, I will just give you a certain task before leading you to the place where you can undergo your awakening. But since you owe me a little too much, don't you think it is only right for me to ask you to pay your debt while I am at it?"

It was only now that Shin realized that this old archbishop, who seemed to be kind on the surface, could be somewhat petty.

Before Shin could even voice out some complaints, Archbishop Ronald quickly continued. "There are a few problems that the Righteous Churches need to take care of. But since there are a lot of Otherworldly Individuals who are willing to volunteer to do the menial tasks themselves, we are never short in terms of manpower."

"Instead, what we lack right now is competent and trustable individuals that we can rely on when dealing with the more dangerous, much more difficult, and most important jobs such as tracking and hunting down the remnants of the Corrupted Cult that are still causing chaos in the most secluded outskirts of the Kingdom."

"We have already collaborated with the Adventurer Guild and the Royal Court for this, so there will be not much of a problem with that."

Shin was quite confused about those words since all those topics that the archbishop had mentioned indicated that he was needed to do such tasks.

That was when he heard the next part of the concerns of the archbishop.

"But since we are too focused on dealing with the aftermath of the previous invasion and the remnants that the cult has left behind, we somehow overlooked some of the problems that we are supposedly dealing with before everything happened."

The archbishop paused for a moment and threw a stack of papers on the table right in front of Shin before continuing.

"Before everything happened, the church was actually currently in the middle of an internal investigation. We come across some evidence pointing to an unexpected betrayal of one of us. And based on what we have found, we realize that it was someone with a pretty high position within the church."

"We are close to catching this traitor, but before the inquisitors can arrive, the invasion of the Corrupted Cult suddenly occurs, throwing everyone in chaos."

"The funny thing is instead of taking advantage of the chaos to escape and run away, he locks himself inside his quarters as if he is trying to hide from some. Then later that day, we find him dead inside his room."

"Based on how clean the room is, it seems like a perfect assassination. Not a single trace is left behind. He dies before he can even put up a fight."

Hearing that, Shin could not help but remember the time when he first arrived in this church. In that ceremony, he sensed an intense bloodlust directed at him, seemingly hating him to the core.

Hanzo and the rest of the Elemental Spirits that he had that time also sensed it, but they could not pinpoint who it was. But based on what he could remember, it must be someone with similar strength as Archbishop Ronald.

Thinking about this, Shin could not help but feel a little troubled. Based on how the conversation was going, it seemed like he was going to be asked to investigate this incident or even figure out the identity of the assassin.

The problem was his gut feeling was telling him that it was someone that he might not be able to fight with his current strength, especially when that person was able to assassinate an Archbishop Rank NPC without the latter putting up any resistance.

Shin turned at Archbishop Ronald with a little nervousness while waiting for the latter to finally name his task.

He was also praying that it shouldn't be something impossible to accomplish with his current strength.

Chapter 1193 New Quest (Part 2)

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"So, you want me to look for this case that even the Inquisitors of the Church are having trouble with?" asked Shin, going straight to the point.

The archbishop smiled and said. "You still have that temper of yours. It is still the same as the first that we have met."

The old archbishop paused and inclined his head to the side. "Or has it gotten worse?"

Shin gave the archbishop an apologetic smile before replying. "Ah! I am sorry about that, your eminence. Please excuse my rude behavior. But can we cut the case and tell me what my task is? As you can see, we, Otherworldly Individuals, are preparing to head to the Awakened Continent, so I don't have much time."

Archbishop Ronald suddenly laughed when he heard those words as he recalled something. "Ah! Right! I also heard about that. It is also because of that reason that we are currently in a hurry to solve this case since I need to focus more on the issues on that side."

"I may not have the time to focus on this vessel for the time being," he added with a quiet voice that only he could hear.

Shin knew that that the archbishop said a few more words but he could not hear it since the latter suppressed his voice pretty well. Even with Shin's current senses, he still could not pick up to those even if he tried his best.

Then the old archbishop continued. "But you are right. I want to investigate this case but without any knowledge of the church. You have to tell anyone about your discovery other than myself."

Shin was suddenly confused when he heard those words. He was about to open his mouth and voice out his confusion when Archbishop Ronald continued. "There are a lot of people eyeing this case. It grew much larger than we have expected, and it even reached the ears of the Pope of our church in the Divine Empire."

"He wants me to handle this case with utmost care since he also discovers some anomalies within the Council of Righteous Churches. The Pope suspects that this case may be related to what he discovers."

He paused for a moment and picked up another stack of papers before handing it over to Shin. "The problem is we can't be sure who to trust within the church at the moment, especially when everyone is suspecting anyone."

"The Pope is afraid that this may cause the downfall of our religion and may even affect the other churches when it suddenly spirals out of control."

"The Pope is suspecting that this may be a scheme of the Corrupted Cult or the Demonic Churches to break the alliance of the Righteous Churches."

While listening, Shin curiously looked at the papers handed to him and skimmed through them. From what he could get from them, it seemed like these were the investigation reports of the Inquisitors who were on the case.

Then, when his eyes landed on a certain part of the paper, his mind seemed to go blank. It was because he could not believe what he was reading.

It was at that moment that he heard the next words of the archbishop. "From what we have gathered so far, all the evidence is pointing to a certain organization under the Demonic Churches."

"During the previous invasion of the Corrupted Cult, it seems like the Demonic Churches send some of their people with the rank of 'Demonic Messengers' to sneak into the kingdom."

"We don't know if the two work together but we are sure that these Messengers infiltrated our ranks and assassinated the traitorous archbishop of our church."

Pausing for another moment, Archbishop Ronald cleared his throat for a moment before explaining. "We have paid a huge price just to invite a famous and powerful Time Mage, also known as a Chronomancer, from the Divine Empire to peek at the events that happen during the time the assassination is conducted."

"That is when we confirmed that the assassin is from the Demonic Church. And based on what we have seen, this person seemed to be using a special tool that can disrupt the power of such a strong mage from peeking into the past."

"We are expecting that it is a powerful individual – a much more powerful person than an Archbishop of our church. But to our surprise, the Chronomancer tells us that the culprit is an Otherworldly Individual."

Hearing the confirmation, Shin was suddenly struck dumb. His mind was only circulating around a certain thought – "A player killed an NPC as powerful as Archbishop Ronald, who possesses an unreachable strength even for someone on Shin's level." –

Shin did not know if there were some underhand tricks involved. But regardless of what happened, or the reason, a player still managed to assassinate such a strong NPC. Even Shin himself was not confident with that.

He could not imagine that there was someone out there who could achieve such an impossible feat.

Archbishop Ronald did not know what was running inside Shin's head, so he continued. "This is why we are asking you to deal with this case. It is an Otherworldly Individual such as yourself, so we are sure that you are more familiar with them."

"Moreover, you are the only Otherworldly Individual that we can fully trust, so we are entrusting this case to you."

"And as an Envoy of our Church, it is only natural for you to take care of this matter, am I right?" repeated the archbishop while giving Shin a mysterious smile.

While Shin was contemplating what to say, he suddenly heard the following words of Archbishop Ronald. "You don't have to worry. We have already figured out their whereabouts. They are still in the kingdom since they are banned from using the teleportation halls of any city or town."

"At most, they will travel by foot to cross the borders, which will take quite a long time," he paused for a moment before taking out an item that looked like a compass and continuing. "Here, take this compass with you. It will point you to the location of those people, particularly the one who infiltrated the church and assassinated my fellow archbishop."

"Normally, I want to personally hunt them down or at least send my own people. Unfortunately, there are too many eyes watching the church right now."

"From what we have learned, it seems like they are targeting me next since I have full control over all the branches within the Saint Heaven Kingdom. And if I suddenly die, everything will be thrown into chaos once again."

"We don't like that to happen since the kingdom just recovered not too long ago. We can't afford to suffer another setback."

"I don't care if this body dies since we can always send a replacement. But it will take quite some time before it arrives, and a lot of things can happen during my absence, so it will be better to send someone that we can trust and who can also understand the culprits that we are chasing."

"There is no better candidate than you, so you don't have much of a choice."

"Deal with this matter as soon as possible if you are in a hurry. Once you are done, then I can let you undergo your next awakening," he added before resting his back on the chair.

Even though there were some parts that he found weird from the words of the archbishop, Shin could not correctly comprehend them since it was a lot to take in. There were a few strange parts, but he could not dwell too much on them since the notification from the system finally arrived.

Ding

System: Religion Quest has been triggered!

System: Hidden Reputation Quest has been triggered!

Ding

System: Two connected quests were triggered at the same time, initiating quest merging!

System: Personal Class Quest has been triggered!

[Quest Name]: Assassination's Culprit

[Quest Type]: Investigation and Pursuit Quest

[Quest Difficulty]: SSS (Hell)

Description:

The Church of the Sun and Moon found out that there was a traitor within the ranks. But before they could even capture them, they suddenly died.

Upon investigation, the church discovered that it was the work of the Demonic Churches to cut off their tail before they were captured.

As a response, the Messenger sent by the Demonic Churches was marked by the church through a curse. They would not be able to hide for at least an entire week (in-game time) before the mark was dispelled.

[Quest Condition]:

Chase after the culprit and capture them before they can even dispel the mark and escape.

[Quest Reward]:

- Qualification to take the Tier 3 Promotion Class for Nephilim's Race.
- Racial- and class-specific equipment for Nephilim. – [Daydreamer' Mantle]
- Special Recommendation Letter for the 'Inquisitor' and 'Templar' Class Promotion Quests (2)
- Recommendation Letter for the entry to the Awakened Continent (20)

[Quest Failure Penalty]:

- Losing your qualification to take your Tier 3 Promotion Class for 3 months (in-game time)
- Death of Archbishop Ronald (1)
- Huge decrease of your reputation within the Church of the Sun and Moon

- Being sent to Prison Island for 3 months (in-game time)

Shin was somewhat upset since he had to do such an errand first before he could take on his Tier 3 Promotion Quest. This was no different from having a 'Proof of Qualification' before he could try taking the quest.

However, he could only blame himself for that since he had been overlooking his duties within the church for such a long time. He reaped what he sowed.

Shin skimmed through the quest details before having a look of interest.

He could overlook the basic quest information since he had already heard most of it, if not more, from Archbishop Ronald himself. What made him interested in it were the rewards and penalties.

This quest's rewards and penalties were very specific compared to the ones that he had before. Even the equipment that he would be receiving was indicated in it. However, he could not read its details.

There were also recommendation letters. The first one was obviously a 'Proof of Qualification' meant for a Tier 3 Class Promotion.

It was similar to the ones that they had gotten from the Empire Quest that they did recently, but the forms were just a little different. One was in the form of a marble with miniature sculptures inside while the other was in the form of a letter.

One was already good enough, but having two was obviously better. Even though he did not have much use for them, he could at least give them to his friends or even sell them for a good price. After all, their average price from the market was still skyrocketing up until now.

The second recommendation letter seemed to be a free entry to the Awakened Continent or at least a ticket to head over to that place after being promoted to Tier 3 Class.

From the information that the game company had released, it seemed like the players needed to meet a few prerequisites before they could enter the Awakened Continent, and reaching Tier 3 of the respective classes was just one of them.

This letter seemed to be used to bypass one or two of them if he was not wrong.

As for the penalties, there was only a single thing that Shin was interested in.

The thing about the so-called Prison Island sounded somewhat intriguing, but it was not enough to make him fully interested in it. From what he could guess, it might be similar to the one that he and the rest of his class went to during their entrance examination.

It was just a huge prison.

What really piqued his interest was the phrase regarding Archbishop Ronald. He could guess that the old man would die as well as the cause of death once he failed this mission.

The thing that puzzled him about that was the numerical number (1) beside it. He was not sure what it meant but he could at least make some guesses. But since he did not have any proof for it, he could not come up with the correct answer.

He could only look at the old archbishop with an inquiring look. Unfortunately, the latter ignored his gaze and closed his eyes.

Seeing that, Shin could only shrug his shoulders before turning picking up the things that he needed before turning around to leave.

Chapter 1194 An Interesting Paladin

...

Shin headed to the mission hall of the church right after he left the office of Archbishop Ronald. He was going to look if there were any quests that could pique his interest.

It was not like he was going to take them right away. He just wanted to see if he could take a few of them later once he was done with everything he had or if he failed to clear his Class Promotion Quest just like the others.

It was not like he was being too overconfident with himself. But he was sure that his success rate for his class promotion would be much higher than the others since he already had a key to clearing them.

However, he was not too conceited about it since it was clear that the promotion quest was pretty much an important milestone given the current circumstances of every player and the clues that the developers had released.

Based on what he could see, it seemed like Tier 3 and Tier 6 would be the huge milestones in the classes.

In Tier 3 Players with ordinary races could have the chance to rival the Transcendent Races through completing the evolution of their respected Ascended Classes and the peak of every regular class.

As for Tier 6, Shin thought that it was related to gods and the higher plane mentioned by Dracula before. Tier 4 was meant for Enlightened Classes while Tier 5 was the peak of the lower plane which was most likely a Sovereign Being just like Dracula, or Draco and Lycan at their peak.

Following that pattern, Shin suspected that his thoughts were most likely the case.

Shin walked through the corridor of the church, completely unhindered, while thinking about those things.

When he finally arrived at the mission hall, he immediately saw that it was filled with a lot of players. Some were affiliated with the Church of the Sun and Moon while the others were their friends, who came with them.

He looked at the hall for a couple of moments before entering. He ignored all the quests of low difficulty and walked past the counters meant for low-ranking members.

Instead, he went straight to the counter where the most important and most difficult quest could be taken from. When he arrived there, there were only a handful of players looking at the bulletin board and looking for quests with the highest level of difficulty.

Shin swept his gaze at these players, looking at them with interest. The fact that they were here could only mean two things. First, they had accumulated enough merit points to take on these quests and gained a certain level of status within the church.

The second was their strength. They should be quite skilled to have the guts to take on these quests, which clearly reflected how strong they were.

He wanted to know that they were a decent seeding. He might find some interesting guys that he could potentially recruit or befriend with.

But after a few moments, he shook his head as he could not find anyone who could pique his interest. They all seemed to be pretty ordinary in his eyes even though they were already a subject of worship for any other players.

After shaking his head in disappointment, he walked over to the bulletin board and looked for a quest that could interest him. But after looking through everything, none of the quests posted were not of interest.

The quests themselves were not that interesting and the rewards for completing them were not that worth of his time. Even the most difficult quest did not provide any rewards that could interest him.

With that, Shin shook his head and turned around to live. He first needed to know more about his ongoing quest before proceeding with the pursuit.

When he was about to turn, he was suddenly caught off guard by a person walking past him from his side. He did not expect the appearance of that person.

But with his quick reaction speed, he quickly halted his spin and slightly kicked the ground to stride back, avoiding the collision with the other party.

Swoosh!

After that, he raised his head and looked at that person with scrutinizing eyes. It was true that he was slightly lost in thought at that time and somewhat distracted, but it did not mean that he could not sense his surroundings.

The fact that this person was able to approach him that close without him knowing, proved that they were not someone ordinary. And when his gaze landed on that person, he could instantly recognize their strength. It was clear that they were somewhat giving off a threatening feeling given the strong yet invisible aura enveloping their body.

However, it could not affect Shin given the current strength that he had.

Regardless, it was still a sign of their strength. It was obvious that they were a pretty skilled player and a very strong ranker at that.

While Shin was observing the latter, the other player was also doing the same. He was looking at Shin with a surprised look on his face and even very tense nerves.

The reason why he almost collided with Shin earlier was because he could not feel the presence of the latter. He was walking leisurely earlier before he did not feel any person in front of him. It was as if Shin had never been there in the very first place.

He did not even see Shin due to the negligible presence that he had. In other words, Shin seemed to be a part of the surroundings. This made him hide his presence from most of the players.

He only noticed Shin when it was already too late. He instinctively halted his steps due to the 'sudden' appearance of the latter and swiftly stepped back with a quick spin, distancing himself from that person and preventing the collision.

When he got a closer look at this mysterious person, he could not help but shudder due to the immense threat that he was getting. It was as if the death itself was looking at him, especially when his eyes collided against Shin's midair.

He felt a suffocating feeling that almost choked him to death. "Who is this guy? He is so strong."

He knew that every player who went to this section of the hall was all strong player. They were the best even among the high and titled rankers. But from what he was seeing, everyone else was insignificant right in front of this person.

His instincts were telling him not to provoke this person, or else he would suffer greatly before he knew it. "He is so damn strong!"

Shin, on the other hand, was also giving this player a surprised expression behind his mask and under the shade of his cloak. "Interesting. This person seemed to be not that bad. Not bad at all."

Looking at the other player, Shin could guess that this person seemed to be a paladin. His set of equipment was filled with light to medium-weighted steel armor. He was also donned with the cape that was unique to the high paladins without the Church of the Sun and Moon.

That cape had a color with a mix of red and blue color. There was also golden embroidery at its edges along with the huge emblem of the church, which was very similar to the mark of eclipse that Shin had on his hand, designed at the center of that cape.

Shin only got a glimpse of it, but he was sure that the cape was the one that was specially given to paladins who contributed a lot to the church.

Casting his gaze toward the sword hanging on the waist of this person, Shin could also spot the same emblem engraved at the bottom of its hilt. He also somewhat recognized this sword as it was something rewarded to the players who reached a certain rank within the church.

This person possessed two of the unique equipment rewarded by the Church of the Sun and Moon, which indicated that they were closely affiliated with the church.

Shin was not sure whether they possessed more unique items, but he was sure that this person should have a pretty decent skill to back up his rank and contributions.

He could not see the face of this player due to the helmet that they were wearing. But that was not important. What interested Shin was the strength that they had.

He walked forward and stopped a meter away from that person before extending his hand. "Sorry about that. I did not sense that you were walking by."

The other person looked at Shin with a mixture of confused and threatened gaze. But what surprised him even more was the fact that the immense threat that he had felt earlier suddenly disappeared right after Shin stopped in front of him.

It was as if everything that he just experienced was nothing but an illusion. Even the feeling of escaping the clutch of death was the same.

'Just who is this person?' he thought before finally snapping out of his thoughts and accepting the handshake that Shin was offering. "Ah! It is nothing. It is also my fault since I am not paying attention to my surroundings. I don't notice you at all."

Awkwardly rubbing the back of his head, the unknown player shook Shin's hand while repeatedly apologizing.

Shin looked at the other party with great interest before nodding his head and bidding his farewell. "You seem to be a pretty good fighter given that reflex of yours. I hope that we meet again some other time."

Taking advantage of that handshake, Shin sent a friend request before walking away. He did not care whether this person would accept it or not. But it would not hurt to give it a try.

Behind him, that player stared at Shin's back and watched him disappear at the entrance of the hall while tilting his head. He then looked at the system notification that he just received. "What? A friend request?"

He then opened it out of curiosity. He was sure that this request came from that person whom he just met. He wanted to see who that monster in human skin that he just encountered. "Sickarius? Huh? Why is his name somewhat familiar? I feel like I have heard of it before?"

"Strange? Why do I feel like-...?" He was in the middle of looking deep inside his memory when something flashed through his mind.

He stopped his thoughts while a sudden electricity ran through his entire body. He was suddenly paralyzed because of that.

It was at that moment that he finally remembered where he heard that name before. "Sickarius? That Battle God Sickarius?"

"No way? Did I just meet that legendary figure?"

"That guy from the Empyrean Talons?"

"The one who defeated both Lich God Immortal and Devil God Justin consecutively in his Godly Challenges? That Battle God Sickarius?"

"Am I dreaming right now?"

A series of questions suddenly flooded his head as he could not believe what was happening. Not only did he meet one of the most famous players in the game, but he also received a friend request from such a legendary existence.

"D*mn! I can finally brag something to my classmates! I want to see their faces once they learn I am friends with a Godlike Player; someone with the personal title at that!"

"I want to see them call me an unknown player, who has nothing but high level, now!" he muttered as he accepted the friend request right in front of him, afraid that he would press the ignore button by accident.

He was almost jumping in joy because of this. He now become more motivated to do a much more difficult quest this time.

"With such a rare and important event, I must do something that is more special. Let's do that strangely difficult quest this time for celebration!"

...

In the meantime, Shin, who just received the notification about his friend request being accepted, glanced at it before muttering. "Samael? What an odd name for a paladin."

He then looked at the level of this new friend of his, which surprised him. The guy's level was already in the early 140s, which clearly indicated that he was no ordinary player. Even among the leading players, this level was already high.

He started laughing to himself as he found the guy more and more interesting. This made the players around him look at him weirdly. "This guy is really something. I hope I will see him again next time."

After that, he continued walking along the players in the street before disappearing among the crowd.

Chapter 1195 Pursuit (Part 1)

...

Shin was looking at the compass that he had gotten from Archbishop Ronald and observed it with full interest. It was pointing him in a certain direction, which seemed to be the general direction that he had to go.

It also indicated numbers that seemed to be the approximate distance between him and his target. And from what he could see, it seemed like the other party was pretty far from him. The compass indicated a couple of thousand miles which could only mean that his target was in another city or an isolated map far from the Holy City.

Opening his map, Shin made a silent calculation inside his head, trying to guess the general location of his target. "Umbra City? That place is always under the dark sky due to the high density of Dark Elemental Mana. No wonder they choose that place to hide."

Shin could already guess the thoughts of the opposing side. They would be using the environment of the Umbra City to their advantage, making their stats not affected by the 'sacred' aura that was currently protecting the kingdom.

After the last invasion of the Corrupted Cult, the Righteous Churches built a series of towers that were connected to one another to summon the blessing of their respective gods. Due to this, the Saint Heaven Kingdom was under the powerful protection of different blessings, making the corrupted creatures to be greatly weakened.

This blessing would last until the melting of the ice wall separating the Frozen Kingdom from the rest of the world, so it would be at least less than a month within the game.

This was one of the main reasons why the Corrupted Cult was completely defeated despite them being able to secure land from the outskirts of the kingdom. Aside from the constant assault of the players and the churches within the kingdom, the weakening effects of those blessings played a huge role in that final battle.

This was one of the things that Shiella had played at since she was the one, who convinced the churches to build those towers. With the Church of the Sun and Moon and the Church of Light supporting the idea, the rest of the Righteous Churches followed suit.

Shin did a mental calculation while trying to guess the route that his target was going to take. From what he could see, it seemed like they were heading toward one of the borders of the Saint Heaven Kingdom, where the current event was happening.

From what Shin could remember, there was a special event that came alongside the melting of the 'Divine Ice of Sealing'. It was said to be the invasion of monsters and the players needed to repel them to prevent further damage to the kingdom.

Shin ignored that event since the rewards were not that appealing to him. Only the players, who were trying to catch up with the leading pack would be interested in it.

The event would provide a huge experience boost when hunting the monsters at the border, giving the players a great leveling speed during the entire event.

They could also gain some 'Hunting Points' that they could exchange for some items that could further help them during the event or some equipment that they wanted from the exchange center.

There were some exclusive equipment sets that could be exchanged from the exchange center with decent stats. It might be inferior compared to the top-notch equipment set that Shin and the other Godlike Players were wearing, but those equipment sets were still much better than what the mainstream players could hope for.

There were also some limited-edition items – as well as unique mounts and pets – on display for exchange that could attract the players who loved collecting.

Overall, it was a pretty interesting event that would provide the players with a lot of fun and benefits. Shin could already see a flood of players heading toward the borders of the kingdom to join the fun.

Given that, Shin could already guess that his target of pursuit would like to use the crowded and chaotic environment of that place to escape.

Shin's head started to work faster as he was formulating a series of plans inside it. After a few minutes of thinking, he realized that there was a problem that he needed to deal with once he found his target.

Fighting that mysterious player from the Demonic Churches was one thing, but dealing with the people accompanying him would be another matter.

This demonic player would most likely have powerful abilities given that they could assassinate an NPC of a church with an archbishop status. Or at the very least, they should have powerful tools that could weaken such a strong NPC to the point where they could fight him.

From Shin's current knowledge of the game, such tools could only be used when there were other people around to operate them. Based on what he just heard from Archbishop Ronald, there seemed to be some accomplices when the assassination occurred.

They might not have been around when the assassination started, but the hired Chronomancer seemed to be sure that there were other people surrounding the room when everything took place.

Thinking about it, Shin felt that he was not confident enough to face this group of people. He might still stand a chance against that mysterious assassin when it came to a one-on-one battle, but he was not sure if he would still be able to pull it off if the other people on their side joined in.

Given the current situation, he only had three choices that he could use. The first was to ask for some help from his companions. Even a few of them were more than enough to handle the unforeseen situations during the battle.

The second was to lure the other party toward the more chaotic place within the border, involving the players who were hunting there for the event. He was sure that there were quite a lot of competent players who would be joining, so he was sure that once players from Demonic Churches appeared, they would gang up on them to get the bounty reward from the Righteous Churches.

The third choice was for him to face the opposing group by himself while hoping for the best. He could prepare himself to the best of his abilities while also looking for the opportunity to take care of the other party one by one.

Thinking about that, Shin started contacting his friends to see what they were up to. Unfortunately, yet also as expected, the others were also busy with their respective businesses. All of them were doing quests that they set aside up until now with the rest already taking on their respective Tier 3 Class Promotion.

Siegfried: Man~! I am busy right now. I am in the middle of taking my promotion quest and this is the third time already! Don't bother me. F*ck! I got killed again!

Simba: Sorry, Shin Bro, I am doing my class promotion right now. It is really hard as the others say. I am not sure how to clear it, so I need to focus on this for now.

Arielle: Sorry, Shin. I am currently stacked inside an independent dungeon. I need to clear this first before I can get out. But even then, I have to clear my class promotion quickly since these two quests are closely connected. I only have a limited time to clear them both.

Lawless: Aw, too bad. I am already out of the Saint Heaven Kingdom to look for clues on how to upgrade my Bloodline inside the game – it will have a critical impact once I take on my class promotion quest. I will take some time before I can come back.

Faker: I am currently in an Ancient Battlefield for my Class Promotion Quest. I don't know when I can come out.

Owen: I must apologize, brother. I like to spend this time with Ithilien. Take care of your problems yourself.

Khing: You can take care of yourself, Junior Brother. I trust you – you can do it!

...

The rest of the group had valid reasons behind their rejection, but what Owen had said was clearly 'selfish'. Instead of doing important quests to be productive, he was wasting his time chasing after skirts.

Shin chuckled a little as he was guessing that everything was coming quite well for Owen. "It seems like their relationship progressed smoothly."

As for David, his senior brother, Shin completely ignored the guy after spamming a series of 'encouraging' messages. He was sure that this guy was only there to annoy him.

After confirming that he would not be getting any help from this quest, he decided to take the route with the hardest obstacle to overcome. It seemed like he would be doing this quest by himself.

He could also consider hiring some skilled players as mercenaries, but he would like to face everything on his own rather than sharing the quest and its rewards with unfamiliar people.

While Shin was finalizing the plan inside his head, he suddenly appeared at the Teleportation Hall of the Umbra City. The place was not as packed as the other city that Shin had visited. After all, this was one of the most average cities within the Saint Heaven Kingdom.

Shin swept his gaze at the surroundings before heading out to the exit as soon as possible. And right after he left the hall, he immediately saw the plaza of the city which was almost devoid of people.

"It is really not as famous as the other cities," muttered Shin to himself.

Based on his estimate, the cities that were close to the borders of the kingdom were currently packed with players, who wanted to join the event. This was the reason why he did not want to head to those cities right away since he would be having some trouble.

At the same time, he also wanted to use this place as the starting point of his investigation. He would have to predict the movements of the other party by following their tracks. As long as he had their route drawn inside his head, he would be able to read how they were going to act and advance during this pursuit.

He could forget about the rest of the problems for now. First, he had to catch up to them and know exactly how many he was facing to know how he would deal with them.

After moving to a secluded corner of the city, Shin quickly took out the compass and looked at it. Not long after, the general direction where he had to go, and the approximate distance of his target was quickly displayed on it.

"North-east, approximately 500 kilometers," he mumbled before frowning. "They are already that far? That means they are moving through the official road for them to be this fast."

"Or they have special mounts that can travel through the woods completely unhindered," he added as he quickly moved.

He quickly headed toward the exit of the city and swiftly entered the woods while summoning Whitie, who was currently in his tiger form, at the same time. He then quickly mounted the white tiger with blazing paws and urged the guy to move forward.

Since the white tiger could move within the woods quite mobile and agile, Shin chose to travel through it instead of the main road. It was for him not to attract any unnecessary attention during the pursuit and to avoid the scouts of the other party, who were possibly looking out for their pursuers.

At the same time, Shin summoned all his Elemental Spirits and ordered them to scout the area ahead and secure a safe path for him.

The fastest and most mobile among them – which were Blackie, Grimrace, Hanzo, and Vladimir – were tasked to move independently while looking for the traces of the opposing party.

Given the strength of his opponents and the organization that they were involved with, Shin was confident that they were aware of the existence of the Elemental Spirits. If they learned about Shin possessing a group of elementals, he knew that they would use a 'Spirit Awe' skill to forcefully unsummon them.

Having these thoughts, Shin had to take the initiative and summon them first before striking an ambush. With this, he could deal the most damage to the opposing side before they could even retaliate. And if it was successful, he might even finish the other side in one fell swoop.

...

While Shin was running through the woods with his mount and elemental spirits, his target of pursuit was able to sense them from a very far distance.

Within a mountain forest, which was filled with plant-type monsters, a group of hooded individuals were currently traveling along the road.

A few moments later, the person who was leading the group suddenly halted his steps before turning his head around. He looked in a certain direction, seemingly able to see their pursuers.

"It looks like the church has finally caught up to us," he muttered before turning to the others and giving out his orders. "Team 1 and 2, you are to be left behind and delay them to the best of your abilities."

"Buy as much time as you can while we are advancing to the rendezvous point. Once we reach that place, we can consider this mission a complete success," he added before turning around and continuing his steps.

He did not care whether the rest heard him properly or not. He also did not care if they had any kind of objections. He just said whatever he wanted and left.

In the meantime, the others quickly moved according to the orders given to them without raising any questions.

Chapter 1196 Pursuit (Part 2)

...

Shin was running through the jungle while mounting Whitie. Their figures were like a blur that kept on advancing toward a certain direction. One hundred meters away from them, the other elemental spirits were currently scouting the path ahead while looking for traces of their target.

Not long after, Shin finally came across a clue that might lead him toward the other party. It was traces of multiple people running in the direction that Shin was following. Upon closer inspection, he was able to roughly guess their numbers and how organized their group was.

"There are at least 4 groups who pass here. And based on the footprints that they have left behind, it is pretty clear that they are well-trained troops," muttered Shin as he sat on his feet and looked at the traces left behind on the ground.

He trained in the Springfield Family, which was a military family. With his training, he was able to gain some pathfinding and tracking skills. And since most of the members of the family were closely related to special forces, his knowledge in this area was also very high.

Shin studied the traces on the ground and could not help but frown deeply. From what he could see, it seemed like those people were currently traveling by foot. They were neither using a mount nor a carriage during their escape, which him Shin a little.

If they were really not using either of those two traveling methods, then it was hard to imagine how fast they were. And given that they were currently moving with a large group of people, and maintaining their traveling formation, their speed should be much slower.

But from what he could see, and based on the information that he was getting from the compass given to him by Archbishop Ronald, the other party was moving with great speed. It could almost rival the traveling speed of Shin while riding Whitie.

Shin continued to frown since this could clearly indicate that the speed of the opposing side was completely out of his imagination.

Based on his calculation, this was only possible if they all were spending their allocated stats to AGI and constantly using haste scrolls and speed potions on top of that.

But even that could only barely make up for the speed of this group.

"It looks like this is going to be more troublesome than I expected," Shin clicked his tongue as his frown continued to grow deeper.

This could only mean that they were currently in possession of high-quality tools that could give him a lot of trouble later. If his estimate was right, then their tools were most likely to be comparable to what the Hand of Midas Trading Firm could provide.

Well, he was not afraid of them because he also had similar tools, potions, and scrolls in his possession. They could rival, or even surpass, what they had. The problem was their numbers, if those people were using them together while fighting him, then he would surely be in deep trouble.

He paused for a moment as he shook his head. He then turned to his Elemental Spirits before mumbling. "Let's just hope that the initial attack can deal serious damage to their forces."

After that, he gave his signal to the elemental spirits, telling them to move before continuing their pursuit.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Everyone moved according to his signal. They went in different directions, getting back in their respective positions before advancing forward while maintaining a certain formation.

Shin and his elemental spirits still needed to travel for a couple of hours before they finally caught up with the opposing party. They still took that long because the latter side was able to notice their pursuers and took a couple of detours to try to shake them off.

Because of that, Shin had to think of another way to catch them. He opened his virtual map and read the travel path of the opposing side, trying to predict their main destination. The moment he realized their

general destination, he quickly gave up on the idea of chasing after them and instead went straight to the place that he had predicted.

He was planning to intercept them in that place and launch an ambush. But despite his perfect plan, he still underestimated the speed of the other party, which made him barely miss them.

Fortunately, the opposing side could not move as fast as Shin and his elemental spirits due to their numbers, so he was still able to catch them, albeit a little too late.

Realizing that they could no longer shake off Shin and his Elemental Spirits, the people from the Demonic Churches went according to their plan and left two teams behind to delay their pursuers and buy enough time for the others to escape.

"Get in position and set up the magic formation! Make sure that they can't break through us so that the operation leader and the others can escape!" shouted one of the team leaders while abruptly stopping and swiftly turning around.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Hearing his words, his team quickly halted their steps and immediately turned around. They then maintain their current formation while taking out a stack of talismans from their inventory bags.

They quickly activated those talismans, which produced crimson lights that shrouded their entire body. Their respective aura also rose accordingly, signifying a huge boost in their stats.

They were expecting that there was a group of top rankers chasing after them, or even titled rankers, so they had to be in their best form when facing the opposing side.

Right after the talismans were fully activated, they quickly used their berserk skills alongside the release of their demon forms. They were not planning to hold back this time, which was why they wanted to go all-out from the very start.

In the meantime, the other team that stopped alongside them quickly spread out, heading toward a different direction. At first, their destination looked a little random. But upon closer inspection, it was obvious that they had a clear destination in mind.

When they thought that they had created enough space, they quickly turned around before taking out a metal rod from their respective inventories.

They stopped and channeled their contaminated mana on those metal rods before stabbing them on the ground almost simultaneously.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Right after the black rods pierced through the ground and stood erect while vibrating intensely. The corrupted mana that they currently had become agitated and started sucking the surrounding mana and contaminating them.

Swoosh!

Not long after, the metal turned crimson alongside the contaminated mana from their surroundings. Then the crimson mana was suddenly channeled onto the ground before spearing in a different direction.

They moved so fast that the mana coming from the metal rods met and started merging with one another, forming a huge demonic circle on the ground.

The demonic circle was covering a radius of five hundred meters, making it obvious that it was a territorial formation.

It was only noticeable when someone was inside the formation, but anyone who was outside of it would never be able to notice its existence.

However, its camouflage effect was nothing in front of Supreme and Monarch Elemental Spirits on Shin's side.

Before they could even step on it, Hanzo, who was heading first was able to notice the demonic formation. He immediately informed Shin about it through a telepathic message before he could even reach it.

Shin wore a deep frown when he heard about it. He then thought of something before quickly instructing. "Old Spirit, avoid it and head straight to the location that I indicated. You have to stop the other team from reaching it or at least prevent them from doing whatever they are trying to do."

"Bring Solus and Astaroth with you-..." he was just in the middle of talking when he was suddenly interrupted by those two.

"But my liege, how about your safety?"

"I apologize for this, my lord. But I also do not agree with this!"

Aside from cringing from the way those two addressed him, as well as their tone, Shin felt a little helpless at the current situation.

Given what he had seen so far, he could roughly guess the strength of the opposing side. With that, he could only send his best partners to make sure that they stood a chance. Even though he was confident about the strength of his Reaper's Retainers, he still could not underestimate a player who could kill an Archbishop Rank NPC.

Elemental Spirits like the three were the only ones that Shin could think of who would be able to stand a chance against that person.

He turned his head at the two before saying. "You don't have to worry about that. These guys shouldn't be too much of a threat since the main leader is not with them."

"Moreover, Grimrace and Vladimir have also grown stronger, so I will be fine. Blackie and Whitie are with me too, so we have a low chance of taking risks."

Astaroth seemed to not hear the latter parts of his words as he could only focus on the names of the first two elemental spirits. "Those two idiots are the reason why we can't leave you behind, my lord! We can't entrust your safety in the hands of this clown and vampire!"

The corner of Shin's mouth suddenly twitched when he heard that before shaking his head. "I have already made up my mind. You can't change it now."

He then turned to Hanzo and Solus before continuing. "Bring this guy and move. We don't have much time to waste. You have to stop those guys from reaching that place, or else this mission will be a total failure."

Solus hesitated for a moment before quickly nodding her head. She formed a flaming whip that she wrapped around Astaroth's body before dragging him.

Hanzo also summoned spatial cuffs that bound the hands and feet of the Obsidian Earthen Spirit, making it easier for Solus to drag him around.

After that, the three of them disappeared, heading toward the location that Shin had indicated.

In the meantime, Shin quickly dismounted from Whitie and ordered the latter to transform back to his humanoid form.

After that, he ordered the four to take the lead before following closely behind.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

They just stepped on the field when the four elemental spirits immediately sensed the strong suppression powers of the demonic formation. The strong suppression from it was greatly affecting their strength and overall performance.

They might still be able to fight in this state, but their battle prowess was greatly restricted. Their movement felt a little sluggish, making it hard to showcase their full capabilities.

Realizing that this was going to be a much tougher fight than they had expected, the four elemental spirits quickly entered their transformed form.

'Elemental Spirit Transformation (Light): Divine Ruler'

Whitie was the first to make his move. A third eye with a golden pupil suddenly appeared at the center of his forehead and a translucent crown was suddenly manifested above his head.

His furs grew a little thicker as the black stripes around his body grew longer.

His claws also became longer and sharper as he transformed into a streak of light that charged forward, crushing everything in his path.

Swoosh!

"They are here!" shouted one of the team leaders, warning the members of his team.

As a response, the players around him quickly assumed a battle position while getting ready to fight.

At that time, Whitie finally arrived in front of their team leader and swung his claws like a savage beast.

Bang!

The team leader, who had Knight Class, quickly raised his shield and blocked. The collision quickly produced a strong impact that pushed him back, forcing him to go skidding backward.

Seeing that, their team leader was instantly put in a disadvantageous position, the rest of the group quickly charged forward, providing some assistance.

Their teamwork was top-notch, making it hard for Whitie to continue his assault. He was instantly forced to take a defensive position due to the flawlessly coordinated attack of the group.

When they formed a trapping formation, they suddenly made a grabbing motion in the air. And when they pulled back, black chains suddenly appeared and wrapped themselves around Whitie's body, completely binding him.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

But before they could even celebrate, spears made of crimson blood suddenly fell from the sky, breaking the black chains and freeing Whitie from their bindings.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Bang!

Then Vladimir, who was currently holding a crimson rapier in his right hand and had a pair of bat-like wings made of blood behind him, suddenly landed on the ground.

There was also a glowing crown over his head, making his appearance more dignified and majestic.

'Elemental Spirit Transformation: Blood Sovereign'

Not waiting for the other party to recover themselves, Whitie and Vladimir quickly went back into action and started attacking everyone.

In the meantime, within the woods, Blackie and Grimrace were also engaging an intense battle against the other team of the opposing side.

The two of them were also under their Elemental Spirit Transformation, yet their strength could barely match the opposing party.

Shouts and screams could be heard in the mountain forest as the battle continued. The clanking of metals and clashing of weapons could be heard reverberating in the entire place, signifying the intensity of the battle.

It was already too late before the people from the Demonic Churches realized that they were currently facing a group of Elemental Spirits. And it was even more useless since none of them had a 'Spirit Awe' skill that could forcefully unsummon them.

And before they could even make some adjustments, the Grim Reaper suddenly made his appearance.

Chapter 1197 Pursuit (Part 3): A Veteran Demonic Player

...

Shin was pretty surprised at the battle prowess of these people from the Demonic Churches. They were very skilled, and their techniques were all high-level. He could tell at a single glance that they were all trained in advanced martial arts or mentalism techniques.

Even though they could not use the Reality Manifestation, their strength was not far from reaching it. However, they also needed more than a single push to reach that special state.

In exchange, they were able to bridge the gap between people with Reality Manifestation and them by using their Demonic Transformation. It was pretty much the same as what Justin and the rest of the Silent Night had done before.

They were still slightly inferior when compared to Godlike Players and Titled Rankers who could enter the Reality Manifestation or Hyperactive Immersion just like Shin and Diablo. But they were still much stronger than most of the players, particularly the regular rankers and mavericks.

Shin could tell that they might be some sort of special force within the Demonic Churches, given that they had that kind of strength.

At the same time, he also suspected that the demonic formation that was suppressing the powers of his Reaper's Retainers was the one that they used to assassinate the traitorous archbishop of the Church of the Sun and Moon – or at least the weaker version of it.

He could also feel the strong suppression of the formation, which was greatly restricting him. But it was not strong enough to totally hinder his movements, nor his overall battle capabilities.

"It may be because they are sort of people. This domain suppression formation is slightly inferior to the original one," he muttered before finally making his move.

His mission was to capture these people and not to kill them. This was why his Elemental Spirits were all holding back their strengths a little. He tasked them to incapacitate the opposing side so that he could use the prison prisms on them.

Shin had brought quite a lot of these prisms, knowing that he would be catching quite a lot of players. Capturing them was much better than killing them right away. Once they were captured and brought back to the church, they would not be able to leave that place unless they deleted their characters.

It was pretty much the same as a death sentence or an existence wipe.

They would lose all their progress up until now and they had to restart everything from the very beginning if they wanted to play the game once again.

He just hoped that they would choose a different path at that time.

Having that thought, Shin started to move. He walked out of the woods in a casual manner, seemingly showing the opposing group that he was completely unhindered by the formation that they had set up.

Of course, it was only an act. But it was more than enough to scare the other side and throw them into panic.

And sure enough, the moment the demonic players saw Shin walking toward them in a casual manner, they started to fear instinctively. Their heads were thrown in chaos and their movements started to show a lot of flaws.

"Damn! We are in deep shit right now," the team leader could only curse under his breath after seeing Shin.

A single glance at Shin was more than enough for the team leader to know that this was someone that they could not afford to provoke. At the very least, he was as strong as the commander of this operation, if not stronger.

He also discovered that the humanoid creatures that they were fighting were Elemental Spirits, which meant that this person possessed a Transcendent Class and Race. That alone was more than enough for him to realize the huge gap between them.

He wanted to relay this information to their commander. They had to warn them that such a monster was currently on their tail.

But before he could even open his message window – as if that monster was able to read his mind – the team leader found his vision being thrown into the darkness.

Shin appeared right in front of the team leader like a ghost. His left-hand thumb, which was pressing down at his sheathed sword, suddenly flicked forward, creating a clicking sound.

Click!

After that, the thumb pulled back and pressed down on the guard of the [Yamato] once again, locking it in place.

On the other hand, the team leader was stunned for a second before an excruciating pain suddenly assaulted him.

"Ahh!"

He just found out that his right arm was completely severed, and the black blood was gushing out from it.

He quickly let go of his shield and held the wound on his left shoulder. He then kneeled on the ground while enduring the pain that almost made him pass out.

Due to the recent update of the game, the pain receptors that the players had were also adjusted. The developers made it similar to an actual wound that the people would suffer in the real world.

It was to make the game more life-like and closer to reality.

However, the pain was still slightly adjusted to 40% realism at most since this could damage the brains of the players in the real world if it exceeded that mark. But that alone was more than enough for the players to whine in pain once they were seriously injured.

While the team leader was enduring the pain in his arms, Shin took out a prison prism and captured the demonic player with it.

After that, he casually threw the prism back into his inventory space before looking for his next target.

Due to their team leader being taken care of, the rest of the team was immediately thrown into chaos. Without someone leading them and giving instructions, they were having a hard time keeping up with the combined assault of Shin and his Elemental Spirits.

It did not take long for Shin to capture everyone and lock them in the prison prisms that he had brought. He must admit that they still put up a decent resistance despite losing their leader, but all of it was still useless in front of absolute power.

At the same time, the second team leader was also somewhat panicking due to the sudden development. He had to lead his team to fight against Blackie and Grimrace, who were constantly harassing them.

They were able to put up a good fight against the two Elemental Spirits, but they were quickly put at a disadvantage when the rest of the group joined in.

Blackie and Grimrace were already troublesome to deal with since they could hide in the darkness due to their respective stealth skills.

If not for the suppression of the demonic formation, then they would most likely get slaughtered by those two Elemental Spirits. And since the Blackie and Grimrace were currently holding back due to the instruction Shin had given them, none of them got killed.

But the pain that they were suffering was much worse than what the team leader of the first team had suffered earlier.

With Grimrace's manner, it was impossible for his victims to get it easy. He was practically torturing his targets whenever he caught them.

Fortunately, Shin was able to save them from being crazy by putting them inside the prison prism. For the sake of their sanity, Shin purposely captured those victims of Grimrace first before they really became insane.

After clearing up the battlefield, Shin was planning to destroy the demonic formation. He was not sure about it, but he got a feeling that he could get something if he collected all the metal rods that were keeping the formation active.

He was about to give an order to his Elementa Spirits when something unexpected happened.

A powerful pressure suddenly descended on the group, making them frown and assume a battle-ready stance.

But before they could even do anything, the four elemental spirits accompanying Shin suddenly disappeared as they were forcefully unsummoned.

Shin was completely taken aback by this unexpected development. And before he could even respond to what was happening, an intense bloodlust suddenly appeared from behind.

Sensing it, Shin suddenly took a large step forward while turning around. At the same time, he also grabbed the sheathed [Yamato] and pulled it out.

Clang!

Metal sparks flew in the air as his sword collided against a dagger when it was halfway out from its sheath.

It was at that moment that Shin was finally able to see the appearance of his assailant.

The one who ambushed him was a demonic player with a pair of horns curving up from their forehead. They also had a pair of bat-like wings and a long reptilian tail on their back. Their skin was covered with obsidian scales with a rhombus shape that were protecting their body.

Their demonic eyes had crimson pupils while the supposedly white part of those eyes was completely black, making them look hideous and horrifying. Their sharp teeth and pointed canines were also making them look more terrifying.

There was also a black miasma coming out from their bodies, creating an unknown pressure surrounding them.

Upon closer inspection, Shin could tell that it was coming from the corrupted mana from the surroundings. The mana being corroded by the demonic formation was being transferred to this person.

The hood of the cloak hanging over Shin's head was slightly blown by the wind produced by the collision. It made the shade hiding his face somewhat clear away, giving the demonic player a better look at Shin.

The demonic player might not be able to see the real appearance of Shin due to the mask that the latter was wearing. But at the very least, he could recognize that unique mask since it was one of the signature items of the famous 'Nameless Swordsman', one of Shin's personas inside the game.

"So, it turns out the famous 'Battle God' is actually on our tail. No wonder two teams are not enough to stop you," said the demonic player while retreating away from Shin.

"I know that there is a reason why the commander asks me to stay behind. But isn't this way beyond my pay rate? I should be thankful that destroying the demonic formation is too complicated, or else I will be running away right now," he added as he played with his daggers and tossed them in the air.

Shin looked at this particular demonic player full of caution. From what he could feel, this player was much stronger than the previous ones that he just fought.

He was at least as strong as the other members of the Silent Night when joined the Demonic Church. It might even be as strong as Justin in his strongest demonic form and ancient battlefield due to the demonic formation cast in the surroundings.

From what he could tell, this demonic form was also much more complete than what Justin used to have during their last battle, so Shin could guess that this was a real demonic player with a pretty high standing within the Demonic Church.

A veteran demonic player who was very familiar with the demonic powers that they had. And the special traits that they had both in their respective classes and races.

"If this guy is already this strong, then how much stronger this so-called commander can be?" he muttered to himself while warily glaring at his opponent.

"What are you thinking? Aren't we supposed to fight to death right now?" asked the demonic player with a provoking tone. "Well, it will work well for him since I can buy more time if you continue to stay like that."

He paused for a moment to lick the surface of his dagger before continuing. "But it will be much better if we play a little. I want to see how strong the so-called Battle God of the famous Empyrean Talons is."

"Shall we get this started already?" he said before walking toward Shin in a leisurely manner.

Chapter 1198 Pursuit (Part 4): Battling a Veteran Demonic Player

...

Andre was one of the most veteran demonic players in the game. He was one of the pioneers who first joined the Demonic Churches before any other players. He might not be as strong as the current players that managed to attain certain status within the organization such as a Messenger or a Herald. But he was at least strong enough to put up a good fight against them.

He was sent on this mission due to the high confidentiality that it involved. He was one of the most trusted people with the Demonic Churches and also one of the most skilled players that they had.

He had not taken any action up until now since his only job was to clear up the surroundings where the mission was going to take place alongside the elite squad that was accompanying him.

He was to move with full secrecy since the opposing side could not learn about their real battle capabilities. They had to hide their real strength to catch the opposing side completely off guard when they launched a sudden counterattack.

It worked out very well up until this point as the current commander for this operation was very skilled at scheming. They had tricked the forces of the Church of the Sun and Moon and even eliminated quite a few of their highly skilled paladins.

Unfortunately, they were caught by one of the Bishops and Inquisitors during their attempt at infiltration, making them suffer serious damage. They had lost the NPCs accompanying them during this mission.

Such damage was still fine since those NPCs were from a suicide squad. They knew that this mission would not be easy, and they had to risk their lives doing it. Fortunately for them, they were able to successfully eliminate their target quickly after the initial clash against the Church of the Sun and Moon.

The escape was relatively easy up until that point. But they had underestimated the methods of the Church of the Sun and Moon which caused them the failure of sneaking out from the Kingdom using the teleportation hall of the Holy City during the chaos caused by the Corrupted Cult.

Archbishop Ronald took decisive action and cast a spatial lockdown within the city, preventing any unregistered citizens of the kingdom from using any kind of teleportation method.

This forced the members of the Demonic Churches to run on foot instead and used the chaos of the war as their cover.

They might have successfully escaped from the Holy City and the paladins that were pursuing them, but they still had gotten marked by Archbishop Ronald before they could fully escape the influence of the church.

The one who got targeted by that mark was their commander, who was also the person who personally assassinated their target.

They had used everything they had just to get rid of that mark, but they could not erase it no matter what they did.

The only saving grace that they had was the fact that the Church of the Sun and Moon could no longer dispatch their paladins and priests to chase after them since their spies were already making their moves.

They were disrupting the investigation of the inquisitors that were dispatched by the main branch of the church. They were also using this opportunity to draw a rift between the archbishops of the church and even plant the seed of doubt for everything.

As long as Andre and the other members of the Demonic Churches escaped from the Saint Heaven Kingdom successfully, then they would be able to achieve a lot of things. They could even ruin the Church of the Sun and Moon if everything went well.

The problem now was this person, who kept on chasing them. And the more serious issue about it was the fact that this particular player was much harder to deal with. He was not only a Godlike Player, but also one of the current peaks of that rank.

For the first time in this operation, Andre felt excited. His body was itching to fight right now. It was the feeling that indicated that this was going to be a good battle.

Having that thought, he suddenly disappeared from his current spot before appearing right behind Shin. He then brandished his daggers forward.

Swoosh!

Shin was already expecting that to happen he took a couple of steps forward and leaned his body over, barely avoiding the daggers.

He then skillfully skidded forward while turning his body around and assuming a sword-drawing stance. When he finally faced Andre, he quickly unsheathed his sword and slashed it in a horizontal manner.

He was already using the Reality Manifestation at that time, so his movements were fluid and flawless.

Shing!

'Jade Kirin Scripture: Quick Draw – Flash Horizon'

Swoosh!

The tip of his sword drew a beautiful arc in the air while tracing a perfect stroke. He drew a line as his sword slashed through everything in its path.

Andre also reacted in time, but he knew that it was already too late to dodge. He could only raise both of his arms while holding his daggers in a reversed gripped manner.

Clang!

Sparks flew in the air as the [Yamato] clashed against the pair of daggers blocking its blade.

Andre then took a step back, creating enough space for himself. He then lunged forward while thrusting one of his daggers straight into the chest of his opponent.

Swoosh!

Shin already retracted his sword at that time and placed it horizontally in front of his chest, blocking the incoming attack.

Clang!

Burning sparks continued to fly in the air as the tip of the dagger was accurately blocked by the surface of the [Yamato].

After that, Shin pushed the dagger back, forcing Andre to lose his position. He then turned around and threw a roundhouse kick at the waist of his opponent.

Bang!

Andre responded accurately to it as he used his arm to block the kick. He then borrowed the force behind that kick to retreat a little, creating more distance between him and Shin.

Swoosh!

But before he could reach the limit of Shin's range, the latter decisively took an advancing step and strode forward.

Swoosh!

He then used one of the basic skills that he had not used for a very long time and converted it into a real martial move.

'Extra Skill: Sword Rush – Thrusting Dash'

Swoosh!

Andre just took a couple of steps back when he saw the tip of the [Yamato] rapidly magnifying right in front of his eyes. His pupils contracted due to the speed of the approaching sword, which caught him a little off guard.

Fortunately, his reflex was able to keep up. He leaned back to create a little more distance away from the incoming tip of the sword while swinging his daggers in a circular manner to redirect the trajectory of the sword.

Clang!

When he was successful, Andre suddenly kicked the ground and launched himself in the air, further distancing himself from Shin with a quick flip.

His movements were also quite flawless, which made it hard to respond. Unfortunately, Shin also had fast reflexes and good body coordination, which made him able to follow suit.

Swoosh!

Shin forcefully canceled the skill at its ending posture and quickly retracted the sword. He then borrowed the momentum of his previous charge to continue moving forward and activated the second effect of the said skill before leaping in the air.

'Extra Skill: Sword Rush – Slashing Dash'

Midair, Shin spun around and slashed horizontally upon catching up to Andre.

Clang!

But despite his skilled follow-up, Andre was still able to block the attack. He crossed his daggers in front of his chest, blocking the strike in a very timely manner.

He might have been pushed back due to the impact, but he just used that opportunity to move further away and create more space for himself. When he landed a few distance away, he finally got the chance to utilize the advantage of his skill and used stealth.

His figure started to fade away and merged with the darkness of the mountain forest.

Shin, on the other hand, used his 'True Sight' and 'Sensing Circle' skills to be able to use his 'Zone' technique that he had personally created both inside the game and the real world.

His senses were at their peak when he was using this skill, making it possible for him to sense any approaching enemies from his blind spots or all kinds of movements within the range of the technique.

He also sheathed his sword and got ready for any kind of ambush that his opponent might throw at him. And that attack immediately happened.

Multiple shadows of humanoid figures suddenly appeared and assaulted Shin from every direction. They launched a coordinated attack, not giving him any window to catch his breath.

'Demonic Skill: Shadow Punishment'

Shin responded accordingly and dodged every strike in an easy manner. He continued to move in eight major directions, dodging every attack with a single step.

He was calmly dodging all the attacks with simple movements. He was waiting for the final moment before dodging the incoming daggers, not wasting even a single movement.

Andre immediately realized this and started changing his strategy. He used a different approach during his attack and changed from a coordinated series of attacks to consecutive yet chaotic attacks.

Shin immediately sensed the sudden change in his opponent's attacks and responded to it accordingly. He also adjusted his style and followed his instincts instead of using a systematic attack.

He was also using a couple of casual sword techniques that seemed to be a little too ordinary, but Andre could not break through any of them. It was as if Shin had a solid wall that was blocking every attack directed at him regardless of the timing and angle that they had.

He seemed to be able to see all the hidden attacks following the first series of assaults, particularly the ones that were coming from behind, seemingly indicating that he had a pair of eyes at the back of his head.

As time passed, Andre started to feel a little anxious and uncomfortable. It was as if something bad was bound to happen if he let the progress of the battle continue this way.

That was when he decided to take a different approach. He changed his strategy once again. But this time, he would be using all the powers that the demonic formation was providing him.

He distanced himself away from Shin, creating enough breathing space for himself. He then sheathed his daggers before clasping his hands together.

He did not wait that long as he quickly made a series of seals with his hands while chanting out some words that could not be understood.

Bang!

When the final seal was formed and the last syllable was chanted, the surrounding area seemed to have dimmed a little. Even the sky turned a little darker as dark clouds gathered above that mountain forest.

Shin quickly sensed the change and wanted to do something about it. But before he could even more to stop Andre, strong pressure suddenly fell from the sky and pressed against him.

He was unable to due to it.

He could only grit his teeth and tense his muscles to endure the pressure. He also strengthened his legs to prevent himself from kneeling on the ground.

Realizing that this was not going to work, he suddenly switched his equipment set while tightly gripping the sheathed [Yamato]. He held the sword in front of him, holding the sheath with his left hand while grabbing the hilt of the sword with the other.

He then inhaled deeply while activating one of the blessings that the [Yamato] had received when it was reforged by Berlin.

The [Yamato] released a blinding light before separating into two different swords; one was a pure-white katana while the other was a pitch-black one.

He also did not stop there as he quickly summoned Whitie Blackie to possess those swords respectively. "Light Reaper! Dark Reaper!"

Right after he called out their reaper's names, the two specks of light circling around him broke free from their respective revolution and fused with the pair of swords that he was holding.

'Elemental Spirit Possession (Light): Sacred Vanquisher'

'Elemental Spirit Possession (Darkness): Abyssal Conqueror'

While they were releasing two opposing lights, Shin held the swords in front of him, crossed against each other.

Chapter 1199 Pursuit (Part 5): Becoming One with Nature

...

Shin held the pair of swords in front of them, crossing them against each other. At the same time, he also activated the 'Eclipse Wielding' Epic Combat Technique to produce the same effects as the 'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship' that he had in the real world.

Alongside the Elemental Spirit Possession, he further strengthened the battle prowess that he had. The aura surrounding me was also much stronger than earlier, especially since everything was under the influence of Reality Manifestation.

"I am planning to be more familiar with my sword-drawing technique alongside my fire elemental attribute, but I guess it can't be helped since Solus is not around," he muttered as he twirled the two swords, drawing beautiful trails in the air with their light.

"Let's settle with my original swordsmanship. It has been a while since I've used this," he added before disappearing from his current location.

This time, he wanted to take the initiative to attack.

Swoosh!

He reappeared in front of Andre within an instant. He then stomped on the ground for a sudden halt before swinging the left-hand sword forward.

The tip of his sword left a brilliant white trail on its trajectory. The blazing trail that it had connected the point where he was previously and the spot where he was currently. A straight line was drawn in the air as he brandished the sword to his opponent.

'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship: Sword Excursion'

Swoosh!

The attack came a little too fast, which caught Andre somewhat off guard. He was not expecting this huge boost of speed from Shin just by activating his Elemental Spirit Possession.

Andre was a veteran player, so he was familiar with a lot of things. He was also aware of this combat system that the game had, specifically prepared for players that had Transcendent Classes and Races. And from what he knew, the current boost that Shin had far surpassed the limit that it was supposed to have.

He also knew a couple of players with Transcendent Races and had Elemental Spirits in their possession. But the Elemental Spirit Possession that he could do was far inferior to what he was seeing from Shin.

He could tell that there was something more to it than what he could see from the surface. He could tell that Shin might have discovered something that most of the players were unaware of.

"What was it?" despite having those thoughts inside his head, Andre was still able to respond to the incoming attack.

He enveloped his daggers with a dark aura, coating the blades of the daggers with a dense corrupted mana. He then raised them in front of his chest blocking the opposing blade of his opponent's sword.

'Demonic Skill: Shadow Guard'

Bang!

The attack came a little too strong, making Andre throw his guard up in the air. He even lost a bit of his health points due to the flame embers that were accompanying the strike.

He then quickly retreated, trying to create enough distance between him and Shin. But the latter swiftly chased after him along with the second sword that came after the previous one.

It came as silent as it could be and as fast as it could be. It was already approaching Andre's neck when he noticed it, making it impossible to avoid.

'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship: Silent Blade'

Swoosh!

The pupils of Andre contracted as he saw the rapidly approaching sword. His body tensed intensely for a brief moment when his instincts suddenly kicked in.

He quickly activated one of his lifesaving skills to escape this predicament. He turned into a smoke that dissipated in the air.

Puff!

Shin's sword hit nothing but air. He barely missed his opponent's neck as his sword cut through the black smoke that Andre turned into.

Shin did not linger around after throwing that attack and quickly leaped forward, barely dodging the pair of daggers that were trying to claim his head from behind.

Swoosh!

After that, he suddenly turned around and swiftly raised the black sword in his right hand, blocking yet another strike from Andre, who quickly caught up to him.

Clang!

Shin was about to counterattack when Andre disappeared once again and reappeared from the other side, attacking from another angle.

Shin quickly responded and swung his sword in that direction, creating bright sparks that flew in the air due to the collision. Before he could even follow with a counter, the same thing happened once again, making him turn to the other direction and block the surprise attack for another time.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Andre continued to attack this way, not showing any kind of pattern in each transition. He was attacking from a random angle with a random timing. He was attacking so randomly that it quickly put a lot of pressure on his opponent.

At times, he was also summoning a shadow phantom that looked exactly like him and possessed a similar aura to his own. This not only made it more realistic but also created some distractions that threw the rhythm of his opponent when protecting themselves.

'Personal Combat Technique (Quasi-Legendary): Phantom Illusion'

This technique was one of the highest-level combat techniques that the current players could hope for. Any other player who was placed in front of it would be easily slaughtered.

It was a technique that not only confused the sense of his opponents but also something that could grow constantly as the battle progressed with the help of the demonic formation.

Due to Andre constantly absorbing the corrupted mana provided by the demonic formation that the people from the Demonic Churches had set up earlier, his strength gradually grew stronger as more time passed.

Andre was confident that he would be able to finish off Shin as long as he kept up this pressure.

At least, that was what was supposed to happen.

But it did not take long for him to realize how naive that thought was.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Shin was able to keep up with his irregular attacks and constantly warded off any advances that he had. Each of his ambushes failed while his most straightforward attacks had always been blocked in an easy manner.

Shin was swinging his sword repeatedly, seemingly creating a protective barrier with them in the shape of a dome. He was always deflecting and redirecting all the attacks that tried to approach him from every direction before throwing a counterattack of his own.

Aside from that, Andre also discovered that all the force accompanying his attacks was completely nullified every time their weapons collided with each other.

He then later discovered that all those forces were being absorbed by Shin before throwing them at him with twice the force that they originally had.

Shin was showcasing one of his signature techniques after a long time. But instead of using it as an in-game combat technique, the 'Infinity Edge', he was using the real version where it was based.

One of his favorite martial arts skills in the real world.

'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship: Sword Transmigration'

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

The sounds of metal clashing against another metal reverberated in the whole place for every collision of the two sides. They also produced some bright sparks that were flying in the air, signifying the point of collision.

Shin maintained a steady stance while keeping his rhythm. He was calmly defending himself against the advances of his opponent while also throwing some sword techniques to counterattack, whenever he found a chance.

At the same time, he was also immersing himself in his current state as he was trying to sense the elemental prowess of his Elemental Spirits.

Professor Henry had told him that he could set aside his study about Light and Darkness elements since they could not help him in awakening the innate attributes suited for his Mentalism.

But he could not help but take this opportunity to test a couple of moves, as well as test his luck. He felt that these elements could help his Martial Arts advance to the next level alongside the elements of fire and ice.

He might not be able to use this in the real world right now since his Martial Arts was still currently sealed. But the gains that he would get from the experience would be able to help him with his future progress.

Given that he already experienced how it felt to have absolute control over fire with the help of Solus' Elemental Spirit Possession, he would be able to gain more when using his 'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship' inside the game alongside the Elemental Spirit Possessions of Whitie and Blackie.

With this, he would be able to find the right method on how to properly adjust when he finally awakened his other innate attributes. He would also be able to wield them with great familiarity if he was able to master this method.

Swoosh!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The more Shin swung his swords, the more proficient he became. Or rather, he started to remember what he used to be when he was only using his 'Yin-Yang Arts and Swordsmanship'.

Every twirl of the swords, every swing that he did with them, and every movement of his body had to complement those moves, started to awaken the slumbering beast that Shin had set aside for quite some time.

His movements started to become more fluid and smoother as the battle progressed. His body was also starting to regain the form that he used to have when using this style.

His mind started to remember and so did his virtual body. His breathing, his qi circulation, martial and sword techniques, and body movements were starting to catch up and adjust with each other.

And when they finally reached an equilibrium, something clicked inside his mind. It was as if something was coming back to him once again.

"When the mind and body become one and when the breathing resonates with nature. That is when everything will come back to its origin."

"That is the state of absolute unity. The state of becoming one with nature."

He was not sure when he heard it, but he could still remember who taught him those words. He could clearly and vividly remember that it was the words that Professor Plum had taught him during his earlier days of training.

It was the time when Old Plum was telling him about the different Realms of Martial Arts. Those phrases were the very words that Professor Plum had to him to briefly describe the 'Ascension Realm'.

Reminder: (The Ascension Realm is divided into three stages; Ethereal Opening, Void Manifestation, and Domain Creation)

He remembered that Professor Plum was describing the Martial Path in a different way. He was interpreting it differently because he was also walking a different from compared to the others.

"Don't just focus on yourself. Include nature with it."

"You will not be able to understand it now, but you will realize that my words are right when you reach that point."

"Martial Arts is rather complex when you look at its overall structure. But it is actually much simpler if you look closely into it."

"Let me simply do everything for you."

"The 'Foundation Building Realm' is for yourself and building a perfect vessel of your martial arts."

"The 'Ascension Realm' is for surpassing yourself and becoming one with nature."

"The 'Transcendent Realm' is for transcending the mortal limits and becoming a Transcendent Being that reaches the heavens."

"Remember this well, Brat. Yourself, the Nature, and the Heaven"

"These three are the only ones that you need to focus on, and you will naturally reach the peak of your chosen Martial Path without knowing."

This particular lesson that he had received a long time ago started to come back to Shin one after another, seemingly a flowing water that he could not stop.

Alongside it was the continuous movements of his body that seemed to be applying those words into action. He was still missing a single piece, but he was rapidly approaching it without him knowing.

"After oneself was nature," he muttered as he defended another powerful skill from his opponent.

Then something happened.

As if responding to his words, his breathing seemed to have connected the flow of mana within his body and the flow of mana in his surroundings.

At this point, Shin seemed to have completely merged with nature itself.

It was not an illusion created by his breathing technique or his stealth technique. It was also not a trick that was created by having absolute control over one's strength.

This might be brief, but he truly became one with nature.

Chapter 1200 Pursuit (Part 6): Familiar yet also Unfamiliar

...

As Shin entered the state of being one with nature without him knowing, he also entered his Natural State subconsciously.

But instead of the Natural State that he was familiar with, there seemed to be a slight difference between the two.

Both Natural States fitted the fighting style of Shin, but a slight difference could be felt when comparing the two. One seemed meant for Martial Arts while the other was for Mentalism.

At the same time, there was also a little sense of not belonging to it. It was as if it was not meant for him.

This Natural State was his, yet also not meant for him.

It was a strange feeling but since could not tell since he was currently too immersed in the feeling of being one with nature.

He did not even feel the changes in his demeanor, nor the surging flow of mana within his surroundings. They were flowing toward him like a raging tidal wave yet also quite tamed at the same time.

They seemed to be obeying his orders without him voicing them out. It was as if they could read his thoughts and move according to them.

Sigh~!

As Shin entered this state, a silent sigh could be heard inside his sea of consciousness. But he could not hear it clearly since his thoughts were too concentrated on his immersion.

"I will let it to you this time since you feel a little too desperate about it," said that familiar voice inside his head as his immersion intensified.

Bang!

The surrounding mana turned and revolved around Shin right after those words were said by the owner of the voice. Quickly after that, the revolving mana turned into a cyclone spinning around him while he was rapidly absorbing them.

The flowing mana within him also followed a breathing technique that he was not familiar with without his knowledge.

This surging mana gathered at the center of his dantian and formed a spherical object. It was a core made of concentrated mana with two different and opposing properties. They did not react violently despite meeting at that core, nor did they fight for supremacy.

Instead, they coexisted in harmony without showing any sign of rejection of each other. It was despite their opposing natures.

They revolved within his dantian in a steady manner before separating once again.

One turned into a warm and brilliant energy and moved toward his left-hand sword, turning into the power of the Brilliant Sun, which also represented Shin's Sacred Qi inside the game. It coated the black blade on his hand with a blazing white flame that had black hues on its surface.

The other energy, on the other hand, became a cold and dark energy that moved toward his right-hand sword. It turned into the power of the Abyssal Moon, which represented Shin's Demonic Qi within the

game. A layer of black light enveloped the smooth blade of the white sword on his right hand, making it emit a very eerie feeling.

Shin moved the swords in a slow yet steady manner, creating an illusion of overlapping afterimages of his arms. The swords followed his movements while leaving a noticeable trail in the air.

He executed a couple of simple yet striking moves that seemed to have affected his surroundings.

And when he took his final pose, standing with one foot forward and one slightly behind, a heavy pressure could be felt coming out from his body.

His arms seemed to be in a very relaxed manner as he held his swords on each of his sides. Such a posture seemed to be full of openings yet also looked like an impenetrable fortress at the same time.

His current appearance was a perfect example of complexity. His entire body seemed to be radiating with different pressures that were supposedly opposing each other, which was very chaotic from the perspective of other people. Yet, at the same time, a complete harmony could also be felt.

Even Andre, a veteran demonic player who had experienced many things inside the game, could not understand what was happening.

Even if he added his knowledge of Martial Arts and Mentalism that he possessed was not enough to explain what he was currently seeing.

What he was witnessing right in front of him was far beyond his current knowledge both inside and outside of the game.

"What the hell is this guy?" he muttered to himself while staring blankly at the complicated yet amazing scene in front of him.

He was too stunned to get his head to work properly. He was too in awe to realize that this was something he needed to report to his superiors – or at least warn his current commander about this operation.

While he was lost in thoughts, a gust of wind suddenly rushed toward him, waking him up back to reality.

Swoosh!

He could not see what it was, but he could at least feel it with the help of his rich life-and-death experience within the game and the heightened senses given to him by the Demonic Formation.

He instinctively raised both of his daggers right in front of him while channeling all his corrupted mana into them. He then squatted his hips a little to lower his center of gravity while bracing himself for the incoming impact.

Bang!

Swoosh!

He was sent skidding back despite all the preparations that he made. His guard was also blown in the air as he gave his all to stop himself from moving further back. He even channeled some of his mana toward his lands, strengthening them so that he could reduce the force that he had received from the impact.

But despite doing his best, his legs still gave up. This caused him to trip on his butt after drawing a deep and long trail on the ground.

Yet the force that he failed to nullify continued to push him further away.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He flipped, rolled, and stumbled repeatedly on the ground as he tried his best to stop himself. He even destroyed a couple of trees on his way while he was doing all of that.

He even suffered quite a lot of damage along the way. If not for the continuous healing that the Demonic Formation was providing him in exchange for his mana, then he would have been killed by Shin.

Yet, all of it seemed to be not enough.

What was worse about it was when he finally managed to halt himself from moving further. The gust of wind seemed to have followed him, sending chills down his spine.

"F*ck!" he could only curse on himself as he used a series of movement and lifesaving skills to run away from it.

Swoosh!

Unfortunately, all of it was futile as he was still caught by a powerful swing that seemed to come after him with an unstoppable momentum.

Bang!

This one came from above, so Andre raised his arms and crossed the daggers above him to block the descending sword.

"Argh!" he could only groan in pain as a huge chunk of his health bar suddenly disappeared at that moment.

His entire body was shaking violently as he did his best to endure the pain that he was suffering. He felt as if his innards were being shaken up after forcefully blocking the attack.

This lasted for a very brief moment as he caught a glimpse of Shin in front of him, who was pressing the sword down at him.

That one second seemed to have lasted for a very long time as Andre felt his soul was being dragged down by the god of death toward the underworld.

Bang!

Then the ground underneath his feet suddenly exploded as it sank down, creating a deep crater full of cracks.

Small fragments of rocks flew in the air as his feet sank to the ground. He was trying his best to withstand the force pressing on him while feeling like an entire mountain was pressing down on him, trying to bury him alive.

He lasted for a couple more seconds before his legs finally gave up, making him fall to his knees.

Left without a choice, Andre could only use his final trump card. He no longer cared about the important and rare materials that he needed to retrieve after using the Demonic Formation. He no longer cared about the black metal rods stuck in different places to keep the formation activated.

His life came first.

He knew that Shin would not just kill him after defeating him. He knew that he would be imprisoned immediately after being defeated, just like the other demonic players, before being handed to the church.

It was the same as giving up all his progress in the game, so he had to gamble. He would rather waste those materials and destroy them, rather than delete his character.

"Argh!"

With an enraged roar, Andre activated the demonic formation to its full capabilities in exchange for exhausting its powers.

It would put a lot of burden on the formation and break all the metal rods, which were the foundation of the Demonic Formation itself. But it would provide an infinite amount of mana and powerful strength to the user in exchange – at least until it fully exhausted its powers.

Bang!

The aura surrounding Andre grew more dark and violent as the Demonic Formation channeled its powers to him.

He then put more strength in his arms before forcefully standing up. He then pushed the sword pressing down on him after accumulating enough strength.

Shin took a couple of steps back as his sword was successfully pushed back by Andre. He was somewhat surprised at first, but he quickly regained his composure.

After taking a deep breath, the flow of mana inside him seemed to have changed. From extreme tranquility, it suddenly became a raging wave from a violent river alongside his surging emotions.

His demeanor transitioned from being completely tamed into a very aggressive one. Alongside it, the strength that he had in his arms also increased as he swung the black sword forward.

Swoosh!

Bang!

Andre was able to successfully block the attack but was caught completely off guard once again as he realized that this particular strike was much more powerful than the previous ones.

He still got overpowered and pushed back despite the overwhelming stats and powers that the Demonic Formation had. "What the heck? What kind of monstrous strength is this?"

Suppressing his thoughts, he quickly tried to regain his footing before fighting back. He started throwing a couple of counterattacks while dodging each strike coming from his opponent.

He no longer wanted to block those strikes, afraid that they would either break through his defenses or completely obliterate him in the process.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

But despite trying his best, Andre still failed to control the flow of the battle.

Shin was still the one dictating the rhythm of everything, forcing Andre to a complete defensive. It was as if he was always one or two steps behind.

Shin's attack pattern was completely unpredictable. It was pretty much impossible to read it despite Andre trying his best.

It was sometimes slow yet steady, sometimes soft but sturdy, sometimes fast and deadly, sometimes hard and heavy, sometimes completely untraceable, sometimes full of feints, and sometimes very straightforward.

Andre could not keep up with the ever-changing flow. He could not read the movements of his opponents, much less predict any of them.

The only things that he could see in this battle were the complete blurs that he was trying his best to block or avoid and the lights that were coming from any angle and direction.

He would sometimes see a trail of blazing white flame in the air or a black line with unpredictable trajectory.

Either of these was more than enough to claim his life. If not for Shin slightly holding back on his attacks in order to capture his opponent alive, then Andre would most likely be dead by now.

Andre would naturally want to run, but he naturally knew that it was nothing but a foolish choice. The moment when he stepped out of the influence of the Demonic Formation and lost its assistance, he would most likely be subdued within an instant.

Fully knowing that this was the end of him, Andre could only do his best to record this battle and prolong it as long as possible to gather more information. He would be saving the battle video in his personal data bank before retrieving it later when he deleted his character.

Then he would download the video after the probation period ended before passing it to the higher-ups of his organization.

Seemingly reading the thoughts of his opponent, Shin suddenly smirked before disappearing. "It is time to end this."

He appeared in the blind spot of his opponent, completely hiding his presence and avoiding the 'camera' that was trying to record his moments.

He paused for a moment as he moved his swords in a full circle, leaving a series of afterimages behind.

When he stopped, one of the swords was pointing in the sky while the other was pointing toward the ground. There was also an illusionary image of a Yin-Yang Symbol behind him as two opposing flows of mana were being emitted by his body.

There was a brief pause before he suddenly lunged forward while moving his swords. His arms paused in front of his chest forward a moment, one over the other, while their tips were leaving a beautiful trail of black and white light behind.

Then he swung the swords in a horizontal manner as he passed through Andre.

Swoosh!

'Yin-Yang Swordsmanship: Ultimate Sword – Retribution'

Swoosh!

He naturally controlled his strength and purposely targeted the legs of his opponent. He also came from behind, making the latter unable to retaliate or record him.

Andre could only see himself falling toward the ground while locking his gaze on the back of the Shin, who was already in the middle of turning his swords back to their original form.

Andre thought that Shin had killed him, making him feel a little relieved.

Unfortunately, he saw a black cube appearing right in front of his eyes. He did not know when Shin had thrown it at him, but it practically sealed his fate.

It floated for a second while its segments were moving like Rubik's Cube. Then it sucked Andre in, completely locking him instead.

On the other hand, Shin just sheathed the [Yamato] and hung it on the side of his waist while closing his eyes.

He still wanted to immerse himself a little more in this mysterious state before it suddenly disappeared.